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United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects
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Note verbale dated 10 July 2001 from the Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, transmitting the declaration of the francophone Group to the general debate of the Conference

The Permanent Mission of France to the United Nations presents its compliments to the Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, has the honour to transmit to him the statement by the Francophone Group in the general debate and to request to him to ensure its distribution to all delegations as an official document of the Conference.

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Annex

Declaration by the francophone Group on the occasion of the United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects

The States represented in the francophone Group include countries located on all continents, many of them in Africa, a region that is today sorely afflicted and suffering from the serious consequences caused by the illicit proliferation, circulation and trafficking of small arms and light weapons. Within the francophone Group, we all feel committed to combating this scourge, whether in our determination to control supply strictly and to pursue, in the case of the countries concerned, a responsible arms export policy, or in our direct experience as affected countries when we witness the effects of the continual demand for illicitly transferred weapons which feed conflicts or threaten regional as well as international stability.

We recall that the Declaration of the Millennium Summit, adopted in September 2000, deals with this problem, in full respect for the disarmament priorities established in the United Nations, in the programme devoted to disarmament.

It cannot but be recognized that small arms are, paradoxically, those that claim the most victims, both civilian and military, given the nature of the current conflicts afflicting many countries, small arms and light weapons, apart from their undeniable advantage in terms of cost, proving to be the most adapted to the terrain and to the actions engaged in: easily transportable, they can be rapidly distributed and concealed. The weapons of all guerrilla forces, they are also the easiest to handle; civilians, together with soldiers and children no less than men and women, are simultaneously, alternatively or successively their users and their victims.

Given the threat it poses not only to peace and security but also to the life and future of populations ravaged by war, this scourge calls for urgent and vigorous action. This Conference that is opening today can give hope to those who are suffering. It is incumbent upon the first United Nations international conference organized on the subject to respond to the calls for action. This is our shared responsibility. The francophone Group intends to recall it here loud and strong.

At the regional level, many voices have been raised in favour of mobilizing the international community, particularly in the Bamako Declaration of 1 December 2000, in which the African countries expressed, inter alia, their grave concern at the devastating consequences of the problem of the illicit proliferation, circulation and trafficking of small arms and light weapons has for stability and development in Africa. The Declaration recalled in that respect the responsibility of the problem for sustaining conflicts, fuelling crime and terrorism, promoting the development of a culture of violence and destabilizing societies by creating a propitious environment for criminal and contraband activities, in particular, the looting of precious minerals and the illicit trafficking in and abuse of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances.

The francophone Group recalls its respect for the principles and rules of international law, inter alia as set forth in the Charter of the United Nations, in particular respect for national sovereignty, non-interference in the internal affairs of States, the right to individual and collective self-defence as stated in Article 51 of

the Charter of the United Nations, the right of peoples to self-determination and the right of States to develop its own defence systems to ensure national security.

The problem we are facing requires of course above all a multidimensional approach. There is no single global solution. Action is required at all levels — national, regional and worldwide — and in many areas: disarmament, peacekeeping and peace-building, combating organized crime, ensuring the responsibility of producer and consumer States, without forgetting the need, in parallel, to pursue the whole range of actions to prevent and combat the underlying causes of conflicts.

For the moment, a single aim must nevertheless inspire us, that of responding to the problem of human suffering and insecurity. In this respect, we really need a realistic and implementable plan of action that indicates the will of the international community to move forward and not to shirk its responsibilities.

The francophone Group would like in this respect to commend and warmly congratulate Ambassador Carlos Dos Santos, Chairman of the Preparatory Committee for the Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, for his efforts which made it possible, following a lengthy preparatory process full of pitfalls, to draw up such a draft plan of action, issued as document A/CONF.192/L.4/Rev.1, as the basis for the work of the Conference.

A world plan of action to deal comprehensively with the problem of the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects and guide our future action must of course be based on the efforts already made at the national and regional levels. It is important in this respect to encourage these efforts and to appeal for increased support from the international community. Subregional, regional and international cooperation and international assistance are a vital element in the success of our efforts. We recognize the progress made at the national and regional levels through the development of programmes for the reduction, prevention and management of the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, as listed in particular, in the case of the African initiatives, in the Bamako Declaration.

The preparation of a plan of action must afford us an opportunity to agree upon the common principles and commitments that will guide our action in the future, at all levels, and to decide on concrete measures that will make it possible to contribute to preventing illicit transfers and to reduce the devastating effects on our societies of the proliferation, circulation and illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons. Efforts at preventing the diversion of arms to illicit markets and unauthorized arms transactions and arms flows would be considerably more effective if we could improve the traceability of the arms, which entails establishing appropriate national labelling systems and international cooperation among the authorities concerned.

The francophone Group also notes the common position adopted by the African countries, in the Bamako Declaration, in favour of drawing up and implementing, that they do not exist, national programmes on:

- The responsible management of licit arms;
- The voluntary surrender of illicit small arms and light weapons;
- The identification and the destruction by competent national authorities and where necessary of surplus, obsolete and seized stocks in possession of States, with, as appropriate, international financial and technical support;

– Lastly, the reintegration of demobilized youths and those who possess small arms and light weapons illegally.

The Bamako Declaration also calls for appropriate measures to be taken to control arms transfers by manufacturers, suppliers, traders and brokers, as well as shipping and transit agents, in a transparent manner.

The adoption of appropriate national legislation or regulations to prevent the breaching of international arms embargoes, as decided upon by the Security Council, is also encouraged.

A plan of action supplemented by an appropriate follow up process is truly the prerequisite for the success of the Conference.

The francophone Group appeals to international institutions, particularly the funds and programmes of the United Nations, the United Nations Development Programme, the World Bank and the donor community, to support initiatives and programmes aimed at eradicating problems posed by the illicit traffic in small arms and light weapons in all its aspects. In this connection, we reiterate the call as contained in the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly, addressed to the same institutions, to provide financial and material support for the implementation of these programmes.

The francophone Group would also like to recall in the context of the Conference the recommendation by the General Assembly last December to the effect that, when requested by the Security Council in the context of a peacekeeping operation, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes, including where necessary action to collect and destroy arms, should be provided with adequate resources.

In the implementation of concrete programmes and activities on the ground, non-governmental organizations and other representatives of civil society will also play a crucial role, in support of the efforts of States, for the implementation of the international plan of action we so earnestly desire. We welcome the opportunity they have been given to contribute to our work in the course of this Conference.

The States represented in the francophone Group wish to appeal to all delegations participating in the Conference not to lose sight of the fundamental issues raised by the problem we are dealing with, or of the expectations the populations of the most effective countries have of us; let us not disappoint them.